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CHAPTER VIII.

It was the close of the season. Many people had left town, but festivities were still on. To a stranger the season might have seemed at its height. The Armours were giving a large party in Cavendish square before going back again to Greyhope, where, for the sake of Lali and her child, they intended to remain during the rest of the summer in preference to going on the continent or to Scotland. The only unsatisfactory feature of Lali's season was the absence of her husband. Naturally there were those who said strange things regarding Frank Armour's stay in America, but it was pretty generally known that he was engaged in land speculations and his club friends, who perhaps took the pleasantest view of the matter, said that he was very busy indeed, if a little cowardly, in staying abroad until his wife was educated and ready to take her position in society. There was one thing on which they all agreed—Mrs. Frank Armour either had a mind superior to the charms of her sex or was incapable of that vanity which hath many suitors and says, "So far shalt thou go, and"

The fact is, Mrs. Frank Armour's mind was superior. She had only one object—to triumph over her husband grandly, as a woman might. She had vanity, of course, but it was not ignoble. She kept one thing in view; she lived for it. Her translation had been successful. There were times when she remembered her father, the wild days on the prairies, the buffalo hunt, tracking the deer, the battles, the long silent hours of the winter and the warm summer nights when she slept in the prairie grass or camped with her people in the trough of a great land wave. Sometimes the hunger for his freedom, and his illness, and his sport came to her greatly, but she thought of her child, and she put it from her. She was ambitious for him; she was keen to prove her worth as a wife against her husband's unworthiness. This perhaps saved her. She might have lost had her life been without this motive.

The very morning of this notable reception General Armour had received a note from Frank Armour's solicitor saying that his son was likely to arrive in London from America that day or the next. Frank had written to his people no word of his coming. To his wife, as we have said, he had not written for months, and before he started back he would not write, because he wished to make what amends he could in person. He expected to find her improved, of course, but still he could only think of her as an Indian, showing her common prairie origin. His knowledge of her before their marriage had been particularly brief. She was little more in his eyes than a thousand other Indian women, save that she was better looking, was whiter than most and had finer features. He could not very clearly remember the tones of her voice, because after marriage and before he had sent her to England he had seen little or nothing of her.

When General Armour received the news of Frank's return, he told his wife and Marion, and they consulted together whether it were good to let Lali know at once. He might arrive that evening. If so, the position would be awkward, because it was impossible to tell how it might affect her. If they did tell her, and Frank happened not to arrive, it might unnerve her so as to make her appearance in the evening doubtful. Richard, the wisecrack, the inextinguishable Richard, was caring for his cottagers and cutting the leaves of new books—his chief pleasure—at Greyhope. They felt it was a matter they ought to be able to decide for themselves, but still it was the last evening of Lali's stay in town, and they did not care to take any risk. Strange to say, they had come to take pride in their son's wife, for even General and Mrs. Armour, high minded and of serene social status as they were, seemed not quite insensible to the pleasure of being an axle on which a system of social notoriety revolved.

At the opportune moment Captain Vidal was announced, and because he and Marion were soon to carry but one name between them he was called into family consultation. It is somewhat singular that in this case the women were quite wrong and the men were quite right, for General Armour and Captain Vidal were for silence until Frank came, if he came that day, or for telling her the following morning, when the function was over. And the men prevailed.

Marion was much excited all day. She had given orders that Frank's room should be made ready, but for whom she gave no information. While Lali was dressing for the evening, somewhat excited and nervous, she entered her room. They were now the best of friends. The years had seen many shifting scenes in their companionship. They had been as often at war as at peace, but they had respected each other, each after her own fashion, and now they had a real and mutual regard.

Lali was a slim, little figure, wearing its fashionable robes with an air of possession, and the face above it, if not entirely beautiful, had a strange, warm fascination. The girl had not been a chieftainess for nothing. A look of quiet command was there, but also a faraway expression which gave a faint look of sadness even when a smile was at the lips. The smile itself did not come quickly—it grew—but above it all was hair of perfect brown, most rare, setting off her face as a plume does a helmet. She showed no surprise when Marion entered. She welcomed her with a smile and outstretched hand, but said nothing.

"Lali," said Marion somewhat abruptly—she scarcely knew why she did it—"are you happy?"

tion. She lifted her eyebrows at Marion and said presently in a soft, deliberate voice, "Come, Marion, we will go and see little Richard; then I shall be happy."

She linked her arm through Marion's. Marion drummed her fingers lightly on the beautiful arm and then fell to wondering what she should say next. They passed into the room where the child lay sleeping. They went to his little bed, and Lali stretched out her hand gently, touching the curls of the child. Running a finger through one delicately, she said, with a still softer tone than before, "Why should not one be happy?"

Marion looked up slowly into her eyes, let a hand fall on her shoulder gently and replied, "Lali, do you never wish Frank to come?"

Lali's fingers came from the child, the color mottled slowly to her forehead, and she drew the girl away again into the other room. Then she turned and faced Marion, a deep fire in her eyes, and said in a whisper almost hoarse in its intensity, "Yes, I wish he would come tonight."

She looked harder yet at Marion. Then, with a flash of pride and her hands clasping before her, she drew herself up and added: "Am I not worthy to be his wife now? Am I not beautiful—for a savage?"

There was no common vanity in the action. It had a noble kind of wisdom and a serenity that entirely redeemed it. Marion dated her own happiness from the time when Lali met her accident, for the evening of that disastrous day she issued to Captain Hume Vidal a commission which he could never, wished never to, resign. Since then she had been at her best—we are all more or less selfish creatures—and had grown gentler, curbing the delicate imperiousness of her nature and frankly and without the least pique taken a secondary position of interest in the household, occasioned by Lali's popularity. She looked Lali up and down with a glance in which many feelings met, and then, catching her hands warmly, she lifted them, put them on her own shoulders and said, "My dear, beautiful savage, you are fit and worthy to be queen of England, and Frank, when he comes—"

"Hush!" said the other dreamily, and put a finger on Marion's lips. "I know what you are going to say, but I do not wish to hear it. He did not love me then. He used me!"—She shuddered, put her hands to her eyes with a pained, trembling motion, then threw her head back with a quick sigh. "But I will not speak of it. Come, prepare for the dance, Marion. It is the last tonight. Tomorrow!"—She paused, looking straight before her, lost in thought.

"Yes, tomorrow, Lali?"

"I do not know about tomorrow," was the reply. "Strange things come to me."

Marion longed to tell her then and then the great news, but she was afraid to do so and was, moreover, withheld by the remembrance that it had been agreed she should not be told. She said nothing.

At 11 o'clock the rooms were filled. For the first of the season people seemed unusually brilliant. The evening itself was not so hot as common, and there was an extra array of distinguished guests. Marion was nervous all the evening, though she showed little of it, being most prettily employed in making people pleased with themselves. Mrs. Armour also was not free from apprehension.

In reply to inquiries concerning her son she said, as she had often said during the season, that he might be back any time now. Lali had answered always in the same fashion and had shown no sign that his continued absence was singular. As the evening wore on the probability of Frank's appearance seemed less, and the Armours began to breathe more freely.

Frank had, however, arrived. He had driven straight from Euston to Cavendish square; but, seeing the house lighted up and guests arriving, he had a sudden feeling of uncertainty. He ordered the cabman to take him to his club. There he put himself in evening dress and drove back again to the house. He entered quietly. At the moment the hall was almost deserted; people were mostly in the ballroom and supper room. He paused a moment, biting his mustache as if in perplexity. A strange timidity came on him. All his old dash and self-possession seemed to have forsaken him. Presently, seeing a number of people entering the hall, he made for the staircase and went hastily up. Mechanically he went to his own room and found it lighted. Flowers were set about, and everything was made ready as for a guest. He sat down, not think-

his shoulder—a child! He got to his feet and turned round. On the table was a very large photograph of a smiling child—with his eyes, his face. He caught the chair arm and stood looking at it a little wildly. Then he laughed a strange laugh, and the tears leaped to his eyes. He caught the picture in his hands and kissed it—very foolishly men not fathers might think—and read the name beneath, "Richard Joseph Armour," and again, beneath that, the date of birth. He then put it back on the table and sat looking at it—looking and forgetting and remembering.

Presently the door opened, and some one entered. It was Marion. She had seen him pass through the hall. She had then gone and told her father and mother, to prepare them, and had followed him up stairs. He did not hear her. She stepped softly forward. "Frank," she said, "Frank," and laid a hand on his shoulder. He started up and turned his face on her; then he caught her hands and kissed her. "Marion!" he said, and he could say no more, but presently he pointed toward the photograph.

She nodded her head. "Yes, it is your child, Frank, though of course you don't deserve it. Frank, dear," she added, "I am glad—we shall all be glad to have you back, but you are a wicked man." She felt she must say that.

Now he only nodded and still looked at the portrait. "Where is—my wife?" he asked presently.

"She is in the ballroom," Marion was wondering what was best to do.

He caught his thumbnail in his teeth. He winced in spite of himself. "I will go to her," he said, "and then the baby."

"I am glad," she replied, "that you have that much sense of justice left, Frank. The wife first, the baby afterward, but do you think you deserve either?"

He became moody and made an impatient gesture. "Lady Agnes Marling is here, and also Lady Haldwell," she persisted, cruelly. She did not mind, because she knew he would have enough to compensate him afterward.

"Marion," he said, "say it all and let me have it over. Say what you like, and I'll not whimper. I'll face it. Let me see my child."

She was sorry for him. She had really wanted to see how much he was capable of feeling in the matter. "Wait here, Frank," she said. "That will be best, and I will bring your wife to you."

He said nothing, but assented with a motion of the hand, and she left him where he was. He brooded himself for the interview. Assuredly a man loses something of natural courage and self-confidence when he has done a thing of which he should be and is ashamed.

It seemed a long time—it was in reality but a couple of minutes—before the door opened again, and Marion said, "Frank, your wife!" and then retreated.

The door closed, leaving a stately figure standing just inside it. The figure did not move forward, but stood there, full of life and fine excitement, but very still also.

Frank Armour was confounded. He came forward slowly, looking hard. Was this distinguished, handsome, reproachful woman his wife, Lali, the Indian girl whom he had married in a fit of pique and brandy? He could hardly believe his eyes. And yet her eyes looked at him with something that he remembered, too, together with something which he did not remember, making him uneasy. Clearly his great mistake had turned from ashes into fruit.

"Lali, my wife!" he said, and held out his hand.

She reached out hers courteously, but her fingers gave him no response.

"We have many things to say to each other," she said, "but they cannot be said now. I shall be missed from the ballroom."

"Missed from the ballroom!" He almost laughed to think how strange this sounded in his ears. As if interpreting

his thought, she added: "You see, it is our last affair of the season, and we are all anxious to do our duty perfectly. Will you go down with me? We can talk afterward."

Her continued self-possession utterly confounded him. She had utterly confounded Marion also when told that her husband lived in the house. She had had presentiments, and besides she had been schooling herself for this hour for a long time. She turned toward the door.

"But," he asked like a supplicant, "our child? I want to see our child."

She lifted her eyebrows. Then, seeing the photograph of the baby on the table, understood how he knew. "Come with me, then," she said, with a little more feeling.

She led the way through the hall and paused at her door. "Remember that we have to appear among the guests directly," she said, as though to warn him against any demonstration. Then they entered. She went over to the cot and drew back the fleecy curtain from over the sleeping boy's head. His fingers hung over to take his child to his arms. "He is magnificent, magnificent!" he said, with a great pride. "Why did you never let me know of it?"

"We will be cheerful, then," was his reply, spoken with a grim kind of humor. "You have learned it all, haven't you?" he added.

"They were just entering the ballroom. 'Yes, with your kind help—and absence,'" she replied.

The surprise of the guests was somewhat diminished by the fact that Marion, telling General Armour and his wife first of Frank's return, industriously sent the news buzzing about the room.

The two went straight to Frank's father and mother. Their parts were all excellently played. Then Frank mingled among the guests, being very heartily greeted, and heard congratulations on all sides. Old club friends rallied him as a deserter and new acquaintances flocked about him, and presently he awakened to the fact that his Indian wife had been an interest of the season and was not the least admired person present. It was altogether too good luck for him, but he had an uncomfortable conviction that he had a long path of penance to walk before he could hope to enjoy it.

All at once he met Lady Haldwell, who, in spite of all, still accepted invitations to General Armour's house, the strange scene between Lali and herself having never been disclosed to the family. He had nothing but bitterness in his heart for her, but he spoke a few smooth words, and she languidly congratulated him on his promised appearance. He asked for a dance, but she had not one to give him. As she was leaving she suddenly turned as though she had forgotten something, and looking at him said: "I forgot to congratulate you on your marriage. I hope it is not too late."

He bowed. "Your congratulations are so sincere," he said, "that they would be apropos late or early."

When he stood with his wife while the guests were leaving and saw with what manner she carried it all off—as though she had been born in the good land of good breeding—he was moved alternately with wonder and shame—shame that he had intended this noble creature as a sacrifice to his ugly temper and spite. When all the guests were gone and the family stood alone in the drawing room, a silence suddenly fell among them. Presently Marion said to her mother in a half whisper, "I wish Richard were here."

They all felt the extreme awkwardness of the situation, especially when Lali bade General Armour, Mrs. Armour and Marion good night and then, turning to her husband, said, "Good night."

She did not even speak his name. "Perhaps you would care to ride tomorrow morning. I always go to the park at 10, and this will be my last ride of the season."

Had she written out an elaborate proclamation of her intended attitude toward her husband it could not have more clearly conveyed her mind than this little speech, delivered as to a most friendly acquaintance. General Armour pulled his mustache fiercely, and, it is possible, enjoyed the situation despite its peril. Mrs. Armour turned to the mantel and seemed tremulously engaged in arranging some bric-a-brac. Marion, however, with a fine instinct, slid her arm through that of Lali and gently said: "Yes, of course Frank will be glad of a ride in the park. He used to ride with me every morning. But let us go, us three, and kiss the baby good night—good night till we meet in the morning." She linked her arm through Frank's, and as she did so he replied to Lali, "I shall be glad to ride in the morning, but"

"But we can arrange it at breakfast," said his wife hurriedly. At the same time she allowed herself to be drawn away to the hall with her husband.

He was angry, but he knew he had no right to be so. He choked back his wrath and moved on amiably enough, and suddenly the fashion in which the tables had been turned on him struck him with its tragic comedy, and he involuntarily smiled. His sense of humor saved him from words and acts which might possibly have made the matter a pure tragedy after all. He loosed his arm from Marion's.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A Quaker's Wedding. Bride and bridegroom took their seats in perfect silence, which reigned until one present offered up prayer. Again stillness prevailed for some time, and the bridegroom rose saying, "Friends, here in the fear of the Lord, and in the divine presence, I take this, my friend, Edith Mary Hanbury Agnes, to be my wife, promising, in the fear of the Lord, and with the divine assistance, to be to her a faithful and loving husband."

The bride's formula was in similar words, and a gorgeously emblazoned and illuminated parchment, setting forth the contract of marriage, was then signed by both and attested by several witnesses from both families. Two friends gave short addresses from Scriptural texts, another prayer followed when the civil register had been duly filled up, the ceremony was at an end—Exchange.

Tricks of Memory. It is not unusual to find a memory retentive on some subjects and extremely defective on others. A lady of the writer's acquaintance could tell the number of stairs contained in each flight in the houses in which she had lived and the various residences she visited, yet it seemed almost impossible for her to retain for any length of time a remembrance of things more important.

An actor once performing in a play which had had a long run at once forgot entirely the speech he was to make. When he got behind the scenes he said: "How could I be expected to remember it forever? Have I not repeated it every night for the last 200 nights?"—London Tit-Bits.

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